

## FIA June kickoffs everywhere

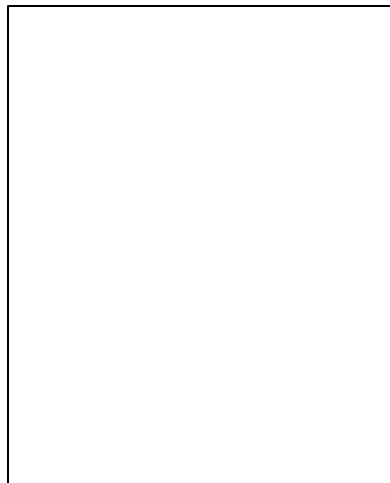
### Summer project, Project Zero, EBT all start anew

NFL training camps didn't open until July but the FIA got a leg up on the pro football season, so to speak, by hosting a series of June kickoffs around Michigan.

During June, the FIA embarked on the newest technical revolution, Electronic Benefits Transfer (see story on page 6) and held kickoff events in 19 new Project Zero counties (story on page 8.)

The **Family Independence Summer Project**, a short-term program to serve non-working FIP families in 13 populous counties, also got under way in June.

The project, thought to be the only one of its type in the nation, focuses on families who have received FIP benefits for at least 60 days, have at least one child one year of age or older, and are expected to work but have no earned income.



Kickoffs in participating counties included FIA staff, service providers and families that access services like literacy, homemaking, time management, health and employment. The essence of the new initiative was represented in a July 2 account in *The Flint Journal* that reported on a kickoff at the Genesee

County summer program, "CAMPP Genesee" (CAMPP stands for community agencies making people a priority).

"Doug Williams, Genesee County FIA's deputy director, said the program should be successful because its approach is more comprehensive than previous ones," wrote *Flint Journal* reporter Marlon Vaughn, who regularly covers FIA stories. 'It's never been attempted like this,' Williams said. 'With this, we are saying the whole family is important, not just the adult recipient.'"

The summer project offers intensive services to non-working public assistance families. Adults included in this mandatory summer project are required to participate in 30 hours of programming a week. Before the project started, FIA staff conducted individual assessments of potentially eligible adults and children to determine barriers to attaining self-sufficiency and independence and establish the family members' strengths, weaknesses and preferences for summer project activities.

The project uses a holistic approach that includes instruction as needed in services including: parenting, literacy, health and fitness, homemaking, nutrition, home repair and maintenance, time management, budgeting, computer skills and community work experience. In concert with Michigan Works Agencies and other local partners, the project will culminate at summer's end with career exploration, job search and job placement services.

## FIA Icon for August 2000

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# Intercepted letters

I think it is important to bring to your attention that two of the day care workers you have on your staff have been so helpful to me and my family. It is so hard to be a single parent as I am sure you know. The two ladies I mention have gone beyond the call of duty on more than one occasion to help me and my boys through times of crisis. They never judged me or made me feel I am a second class citizen because I needed day care assistance while my son was young.

As I draw to the near end of all this—because he will be in first grade and I will not need help in this area—I would like to say thank you to you and your staff for being there and always listening and understanding me even when things got complicated. I think state workers get such a bad rap when it comes to human compassion but your office has always held up with integrity and support for the people that matter the most—the children. Thanks again to **Ms. Saad and Ms. Urquhart**.

Sincerely,

Lori Johnson

*Note: Cathy Saad is a family independence specialist and Karen Urquhart is Project Zero coordinator (and a former FIS) with Macomb County FIA. This letter arrived at the desk of Macomb County district manager Jim Zielke and family independence manager Gerri Mrlik.*

## Recent FIA appointments

FIA deputy director Mark Jasonowicz announced the appointment of **Ann Marie Sims** as director of the Office of Special Projects, effective June 12. Sims new responsibilities include coordinating and directing development and implementation of new programs. “She will serve as the director of the executive level teams responsible for new initiatives and an advisor to the Executive Management Team,” said Jasonowicz. Sims was responsible for development and implementation of the agency’s drug testing pilot project last year. Sims was most recently Zone VIII manager in Wayne County. Her new position is based in Lansing.

FIA director Douglas E. Howard announced the appointments of **Sherry Thomas-Cloud** as director of Kalamazoo County FIA, effective July 17, and **Sidonie Squier** to a new position of welfare reform information specialist. She started July 11. “I am very pleased to announce Sherry Thomas-Cloud as director of Kalamazoo County,” Howard said June 29. Cloud was most recently director of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence of Michigan and has 11 years’ FIA experience in Calhoun and Kalamazoo counties. Squier, formerly director of public affairs for the California Department of Human Services, “will be reporting to me and will be responsible for packaging data and information to promote welfare reform and helping position Michigan for involvement with national policy agendas,” said Howard. Squier, who is based in Lansing to work with FIA administrators and staff to deliver on this agenda, reports directly to Howard.

FIA Family Independence Services Administration director Lynda Crandall announced July 13 the appointment of **Janet Strobe** as director of the Office of Financial Assistance Programs. “Janet has a strong understanding of the relationship between program offices and local field offices and the need for communications between the two,” said Crandall. “She is a strong advocate both for staff and for client-customers of FIA.” Strobe was most recently acting Zone III manager and director of Ingham County FIA.



## FIA Icon

*a publication of Michigan's  
Family Independence Agency*

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## ***From the Director***

***By Douglas E. Howard***

**Director, Family Independence Agency**

### **Working safely in communities**

FIA Icon is read by an audience wider than FIA staff so we generally make the style of my column fit that broad audience. However, several staff recently suggested I write about recent “Lisa’s law” legislation and my views on worker safety. Because worker safety is very important to all of us, I decided to direct this column more to FIA staff.

Lisa Putman’s tragedy was a powerful impetus for our agency to change the way we do business. In the days following her 1998 death, six focus groups were held with FIA staff and our community partners. Based on input from these groups, the FIA implemented a series of changes in operations while maintaining the agency’s mission. These included:

- Adding 78 new CPS staff to provide safety partners for home calls.
- State and local human service partnerships to support staff safety.
- Technology improvements including expanded access to cell and Nextel phones and keyless access state cars.
- New workday policies for staff making home calls including the use of daily itineraries, logs of vehicles used on home visits, worker calls to supervisors at first and last visits, and local procedures for law enforcement involvement.
- Publishing and circulating “zero tolerance” policy posters.
- Michigan State Police training on worker safety.

At the same time our agency was addressing worker safety issues, the state Legislature was considering new legislation known as “Lisa’s law” named after Lisa Putman. The legislation has not passed and the FIA did offer an alternative. The UAW, the bargaining unit representing FIA field workers who make home calls, has taken a very proactive stance supporting Lisa’s law. The UAW expressed great concern when the FIA did not support the earlier version. I know from talking with staff during local office visits that there is no clear agreement on how far worker safety should go and what strategies are the most effective.

I think it is important to share our agency position on this matter. My decision to not support the legislation as it was written was one of the more difficult decisions I have made in the past 17 months. Contrary to some insinuations that have been made, I do believe our staff is our most important resource in the FIA, and worker safety is of primary importance to me. So why did I not support the proposed law? There were two factors that concerned me a great deal.

One factor was that the provision for two workers per home call seemed to be too nebulous in its application and lacking in a standard for us. I believe staff use good judgment in determining when they need help and when they don’t, and I don’t like making decisions based on the exception. However, I was concerned that this could be overused or potentially abused (by a few.) Most important, no one could provide me with an example where current policy was not working. Current FIA home call policy allows for a community partner—either a co-worker or law enforcement person—to accompany a worker on a home call with supervisory approval. This empowers local offices to make decisions on whether a community partner is needed. The second factor was the provision for personal protection training. Our staff talked to trainers and law enforcement personnel, and I personally talked to the Michigan State Police. We received advice that, in a serious home call situation, our best defenses are de-escalation, diffusion and leaving—one said “running from”—a situation. They advise that personal protection training provides no real assurances, can result in injury during training or from improper use, and must be used or retrained regularly to ensure effectiveness.

Professionals recommended against an agency policy of personal protection training, even when narrowly defined as breaking holds and as voluntary, for staff who may never use it. This last distinction is important, because in FIA juvenile justice facilities this type of training is needed from time to time.

*continues on page 16*

# 80<sup>th</sup> Achiever recognized in Kalkaska County

**Her drive to succeed, the collaboration between FIA and Michigan Works Agency and their genuine interest in her well being were key factors**

By Deborah L. Hahnenberg, Project Zero Coordinator  
Kalkaska-Antrim County Family Independence Agency  
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KALKASKA—Friday, June 16 was a very windy and rainy day in northern lower Michigan, but it did not cloud the event at hand – celebrating the determination and success of Karen LaMothe.

Regardless of the weather outside, it was a bright and sunny day for all attending the event inside the All Seasons Resort. Fred Harris, director of Kalkaska County FIA, opened the occasion when he welcomed officials, Kalkaska County FIA Board members, Michigan Works Agency staff and advisors and FIA staff.

Harris also acknowledged Karen's mom, Charlene, and her five-year-old daughter, Kylie.

State FIA director Douglas E. Howard addressed the crowd, acknowledging the strength and determination that Karen had shown over the past few years. He presented Karen with the Achiever of the Month award certificate along with a gift certificate. Karen's shy and unassuming ways were evident in the broad smile she displayed upon receiving the framed certificate.

Howard went on to applaud the efforts by the Kalkaska County FIA and the local Michigan Works



**Karen LaMothe**

Agency office, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and continuing the good cause of facilitating self-sufficiency among clients.

"Every day we hear new stories about the ways families' lives have changed for the better," said Howard. "Events like today's provide the opportunity for me to place a human face on the stories of success we so often hear about.

"Although we are here to salute Karen, it is clear to me that many people have helped along the way to clear the path for her to succeed. I take this opportunity to thank the Kalkaska County FIA, the Northwest Michigan Works Agency and the many family and friends who

have made significant contributions to her success."

## **Karen's long, winding road**

Coming to FIA for help was the last thing Karen ever wanted to do. However when she found herself a single mother only 18 years old with no education and no means of supporting herself and her child, she knew she had no choice. Karen turned to the Kalkaska County FIA for assistance in July 1996. She was struggling to return to high school to obtain her diploma, as well as provide

for her then 15-month-old daughter.

Through the FIA, Karen received Family Independence Program benefits, Medicaid, food stamps and State Emergency Relief—the four programs essential in helping families survive when their own resources have been depleted.

Karen was determined to make public assistance temporary. However, she knew finding good employment would be difficult because she lacked her high school diploma and did not have a strong work history.

In July 1996, Karen was referred to Work First where she was extremely motivated and receptive to the program. She wanted to



## **To Strengthen Michigan Families**

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## **Achiever of the Month**

learn everything she could to improve her employment opportunities.

The local Work First provider, Northwest Michigan Works Agency, helped Karen prepare resumes and develop her interviewing skills. The agency also provided support services that enabled her to fix her car and purchase car insurance.

Even more important, the MWA youth worker helped get Karen involved with the school-to-work program. This enabled Karen to continue with school while also working part-time and earning additional credits.

Karen continued to receive assistance over the next three years and was concerned about being a good role model for her daughter. She wanted to make good choices that would have a positive influence on Kylie's future. As soon as Karen graduated from high school she went to work full-time. Soon her FIP case was closed because of earned income.

With the help of her Work First advisor, Karen completed interest inventories, applied for college and federal student aid, and was accepted at Northwestern Michigan College in nearby Traverse City. She has completed one year of course work and will soon be gradu-



**Karen showed her shyness during presentation of her Achiever of the Month certificate. "She has turned her life around and is a wonderful role model," said Doug Howard, seen here with Karen.**

ating with an associate's degree in business management. Karen is currently employed at Tom's Food Market in Acme, near Traverse City.

#### **So many to thank**

Karen credits much of her success to her mother, Charlene LaMothe, who was always there for her. "I got through this because I was able to live at home, and because my mom has been more than a mom, she has been my best friend," Karen said.

LaMothe thanked Jan Wildfong, her family independence specialist from Kalkaska County FIA, for all her help over the years. During Karen's celebration program, Wildfong spoke to Karen's never ending positive attitude.

"Karen was always upbeat and happy no matter what was going on in her life," she said. "Whenever we would meet, I would ask Karen to rate her life on a scale of one to ten, and Karen would invariably rate her life as a ten."

FIA director Howard echoed these statements.

"Karen has struggled to make a new life for herself and her family," said Howard. "Finally, she is in a path that will inspire not only her personal development but also her daughter's."

"She has turned her life around and is a wonderful role model. Through her example, her family is learning that determination and hard work can lead to success."

As Karen's former Work First advisor, I agree that her greatest asset over the last couple years has been her positive attitude. Karen always came in with a smile on her face, did everything she needed to do, and never complained. She was amazing.

All in all, the 80<sup>th</sup> Achiever of the Month Ceremony was a great success and representative of Karen's achievements. While it may have been stormy outside, inside there was nothing but blue skies and sunshine during Karen's big day.



# Michigan grocers hail new EBT system

**Electronic Benefits Transfer improves security, cuts costs and saves time for both FIA customers and retailers**

JACKSON—Three weeks after Michigan launched the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program and Michigan Bridge Card, local grocery retailers and consumers are reaping the benefits provided by the new debit card.

Gov. John Engler announced the EBT system when it went online in Jackson County June 1. Through EBT, public assistance customers expend cash and food stamp benefits using a plastic card called the Michigan Bridge Card. Cash benefits can be obtained from enrolled retailers and automated teller machines, and food benefits can be redeemed at federally authorized food stamp retailers.

Representatives from Kroger and Spartan Foods joined other retailers, association representatives, state and federal officials in hailing the new system at a June 20 event.

"We're delighted with how easy EBT has been to implement in our Jackson stores," said Jim Perun, vice-president of operations for The Kroger Company of Michigan.

"It not only saves us time in our verification and accounting procedures, which makes a positive impact on our bottom line, but it also allows our shoppers to move through

our checkout lanes more quickly."

Most Jackson County retailers who previously accepted federal food stamps are enrolled as EBT retailers.

"EBT has succeeded at cutting costs and modernizing services in 30 states," said Stephanie Comai, director of e-Michigan, the new state agency responsible for organizing all online state services. "The use of a personal identification number cuts down on the potential for theft and fraud (and) complements Michigan's leadership delivering electronic services."

Food retailers said EBT helped them improve customer service. "Spartan Stores is glad to have been part of the committee that helped put together this system," said Gene McDonald, product manager for Spartan Stores information technology department. "Spartan will be working with our 400 indepen-

dently owned wholesale customers and the 47 Michigan supermarkets we own and operate to install the system. It's a good system that cuts down on cashier time (with) consumers and speeds up the checkout line. That's real customer service."

FIA director Douglas E. Howard said there are other benefits. "We believe EBT will increase the dignity with which clients access their benefits because they will be using plastic cards to pay for their goods or services just like many other customers of the store," he said. "This has the potential to help increase client self confidence at a time when they are making every effort to become independent of public assistance."

The program started in Jackson County and statewide rollout will begin after a successful pilot period. It is projected EBT will be operational in all counties by the end of 2001.



**Jackson County FIA director Renee Hayward was among the speakers at a June 20 event. The Michigan Bridge Card is displayed visually at right with an EBT county rollout map at left.**

# Commission for the Blind customer “graduates” to better work on first try

## Margaret Labertaux moves from sheltered to competitive employment with a little help

By Amy Daniel, Rehabilitation Counselor  
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JACKSON—

Margaret Labertaux always has a smile on her face. This is no surprise when you have family, friends, and a great job.

Margaret has lived in Jackson all her life. She had been working for Goodwill Industries in Jackson since 1985 with the help of the Michigan Commission for the Blind (MCB). Goodwill is a sheltered workshop employer where Margaret assembled cardboard boxes, made partitions and performed small assembly jobs.

Last year Margaret decided she had done every job there is to do at Goodwill and she was ready for a competitive job in the community. She had been hearing from her vocational counselor at MCB and her friends that she had the skill, positive attitude and determination to excel at a different job.

Margaret began looking for employment in Jackson with help from MCB and Goodwill. She thought she might like to do dishes at a restaurant. Margaret heard about a short-term job available at Spring Arbor College, working in the cafeteria dish room and began work there the same day. It involved washing and rinsing dishes, silverware and



**Above: Margaret with Mickey Ferguson, her boss at Fazoli's in Jackson.**

**Below: Margaret at work at Fazoli's.**



clearing trays. Margaret learned her way around the cafeteria quickly and really enjoyed being at Spring Arbor.

Margaret simultaneously pounded the pavement, looking for restaurants that needed a person to wash dishes and getting extra hours at Goodwill when they needed her.

Margaret is well liked and close with everyone at Goodwill, where the staff pooled together to help her find a job. Margaret worked closely with Amy Evans, a job placement specialist at Goodwill and her rehabilitation counselor from the Michigan Commission for the Blind.

One day, Margaret received a call from Amy at Goodwill. She had an interview at Fazoli's, an Italian fast food restaurant in Jackson. Margaret interviewed with Mickey Ferguson, general manager at the restaurant. It went so well he decided to hire her on the spot. This was Margaret's first job interview—ever—and it helped her graduate to competitive employment.

Things have gotten better for Margaret, who has been working at Fazoli's since November. She loves her job and wishes she could work there every day of the week. Her wish came closer to true a few weeks ago, when Margaret began working five days a week. Fazoli's says they have never had a better dishwasher and Margaret has found success for herself.

■ Michigan Commission for the Blind administers service and employment programs around Michigan with direction from a policy board whose five members are appointed by the governor. It has been part of the FIA since 1996.



# Project Zero kicks off in 19 new counties

**Amid much hoopla and celebration, project expands to 68 counties in 89 sites**

Lieutenant Governor Dick Posthumus, FIA director Douglas E. Howard and deputy director Mark Jasonowicz joined local citizens, public assistance customers, state and local partners in June to kick off Project Zero in 19 new counties.

Established in 1996 and expanded four times, Project Zero has a goal to reduce to zero the number of targeted Family Independence Agency (formerly AFDC) families without earned income. This goal has been achieved in more than 50 project sites at least one time since September 1997.

Everyone had a story to tell at kickoff events, which took place between June 12-30 in cities ranging from Monroe to Houghton.

“My kids told me if you get a zero it’s bad, but not in Project Zero,” said Posthumus at a kickoff event in Livingston County’s Genoa Township June 15. “It means getting out there and doing away with those barriers to economic independence.”

Project Zero measures the success of “target” cases—those open 60 days or more where the customer is expected to work and have earnings. The goal of Project Zero is to reduce the number of nonworking target cases to zero. When a site reaches a point where all target customers have earned income, it is said to reach zero.

Howard said Project Zero reflects greater success in welfare reform as the state’s economy has expanded. He said when the project began Michigan paid \$1.2 billion annually in Family Independence Program benefits and about \$20 million in child care. Now the numbers are inverted, as Michigan spends \$400 million annually in FIP benefits



**A Project Zero montage:** Lieutenant Governor Dick Posthumus addressing the Livingston County kickoff (left). At right, FIA deputy director Mark Jasonowicz shows an Upper Peninsula gathering a map of Project Zero counties.

**A gathering at the Monroe County kickoff:** (below left to right): Lisa Drodts, a special guest who told her story about leaving welfare for work; Janet Howard, chief of the welfare reform division for Michigan Department of Career Development; FIA director Doug Howard; Renae Banks-Rouser, who was then acting director at Monroe County FIA; FIA Zone IV manager Janet Burch.



and \$450 million in child care.

“When I walked into this state 15 months ago, I realized I was walking into a very progressive state,” he said. “Even when you hit zero, the work isn’t done.”

When heading up kickoff in seven counties, Jasonowicz told a

parable applicable to Project Zero. The story began with a teacher who asked students to write about their dreams, then flunked one when the student’s story was unrealistic.

Later in life, the teacher visited the student on his horse farm, where he achieved his lifelong dream.



## Spotlight on success

# Candie DeVore: a face of welfare reform

STAMBAUGH—Candie DeVore is the kind of person that makes welfare reform satisfying for thousands of people.

DeVore was the special guest at the Iron county Project Zero kickoff in this Upper Peninsula town June 21. Her story is similar to thousands of other people who left public assistance for a better life through individual initiative and a little help from some community friends including the Family Independence Agency.

DeVore is a single mother to six children—four of whom attended the kickoff event—who once had no transportation and moved her kids around in a wagon. Her FIP case, which first opened in 1987, closed in May and she continues to receive food stamps and Transitional Medicaid, which can provide coverage for a year.

Candie was an AmeriCorps volunteer for the FIA for two years beginning in 1997. While working in a volunteer capacity she completed her certification to work as a nurse's aide and was hired in that capacity at the Iron River Care Center in 1999.

"Going to work meant I was not known anymore just as the lady with six kids," she said. "I am very grateful to the FIA for everything they've done for me."

**Candie DeVore (right) was accompanied at the Iron County Project Zero kickoff by four of her six children and her special friend (below).**



In harshly grading papers earlier in life, the teacher admitted she stole dreams from students.

"That's what I think our program used to do: steal people's dreams," said Jasonowicz. "We offered cash assistance but no help for people to achieve their dreams. Today, the FIA and Project Zero partners help people realize their

dreams of economic independence."

With the 19 new Project Zero counties starting in June, 68 counties are now represented in Project Zero. New Project Zero counties kicking off in June included Monroe, Allegan, Livingston, Marquette, Houghton-Keweenaw, Baraga, Iron-Dickinson, Luce-Chippewa, Mackinac-Cheboygan, Otsego-Crawford,

Roscommon-Ogemaw and Alcona-Iosco. Hyphenated counties are dual county FIA areas.

The remaining 15 counties not in Project Zero are slated to join by the end of 2000.

For more information see the Family Independence Agency website, [www.mfia.state.mi.us](http://www.mfia.state.mi.us), and go to "Project Zero".

# FIA and 4C award \$579,000 in new child care grants

205 licensed and registered providers receive funds

The FIA and Community Coordinated Child Care Association of Michigan awarded \$579,609 in new grants to child care providers around Michigan. Grants were awarded only to licensed or registered providers who serve children from low-income families subsidized by the Family Independence Agency.

Gov. John Engler made the announcement June 16.

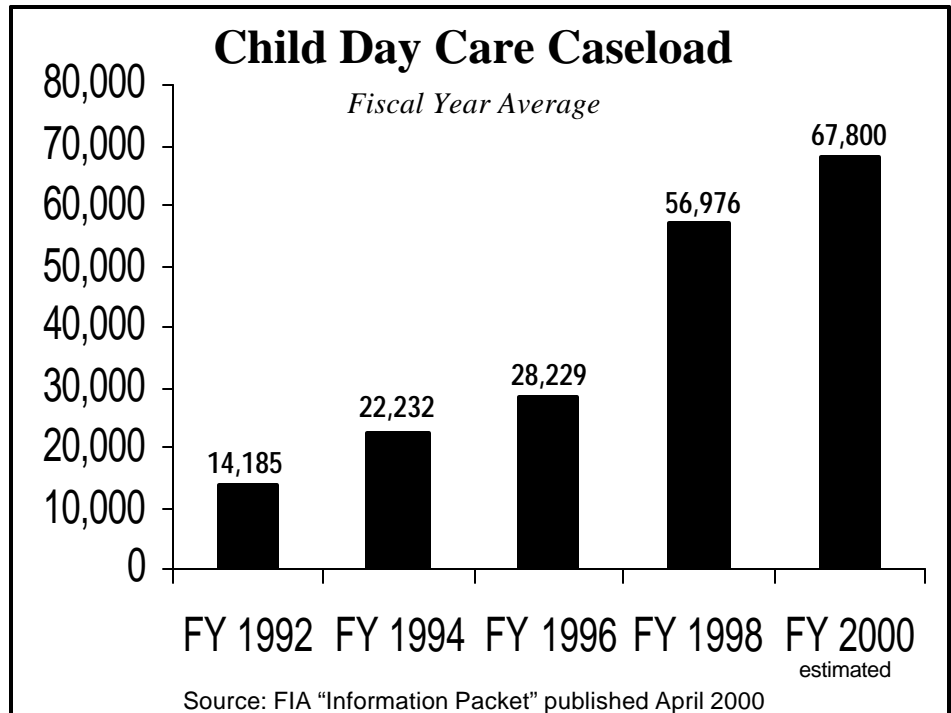
"These grants will provide greater licensed child care options for low-income families," he said. "They will help provide safe, licensed environments for public assistance and low-income parents who are pursuing self-sufficiency in the Michigan work force."

The grant program, called Enhanced Quality Improvement Program or EQUIP, is aimed at increasing the quality and quantity of child care in Michigan. Special focus is on increasing infant and toddler care, care for children with special needs, and care during nontraditional working hours.

Two hundred and five applicants secured grant awards ranging from \$588 to \$3,500. Lansing-based Michigan 4C Association, the leader in the field of child care resource and referral services, awarded the grants.

Funded proposals address equipment, computers and resources to build child care capacity throughout the state, support childhood development at care centers and improve staff knowledge and caregiver techniques.

"In the EQUIP program, special attention is directed to developing child care during afternoon, evening and weekend work shifts and care for infants and children with



special needs" said FIA director Howard.

"The success of welfare reform activities revolves around parents' ability to enter and stay in the workforce. One of the most important supports a parent can have is safe, affordable and available child care that meets their needs and schedule. Grants awarded through the EQUIP program help develop those supports," he added.

This is the third EQUIP grant award during fiscal year 2000. Earlier awards were made in March 2000 — \$345,631 to 118 caregivers — and in December 1999, when \$227,635 was awarded to 81 child care providers.

Grants were made to providers in 58 counties. For information on the name, city, grant amount and details for EQUIP grantees in any county, contact Roselyn Chaffin at the 4C Association at this toll-free number: (800) 950-4171.

The number of grantees in

each county is listed: Allegan, Alpena, Antrim and Arenac (2 each); Barry (10), Bay (4), Benzie (2), Berrien (9), Branch (3), Calhoun (5), Cass, Charlevoix and Cheboygan (1 each).

More county grantees: Chippewa (8), Clinton and Crawford (1 each), Eaton (2), Emmet (1), Genesee (12), Grand Traverse (4), Gratiot (1), Houghton (2), Ingham (6), Ionia (3), Iosco (2) and Jackson (1).

More county grantees: Kalamazoo (11), Kalkaska (2), Kent (15), Lapeer (3), Leelanau and Livingston (1 each), Macomb (7), Manistee and Marquette (1 each), Mason (2), Mecosta (3), Menominee and Midland (1 each), Missaukee (3), Montcalm (3), Montmorency (2), Muskegon (7) and Newaygo (2).

More county grantees: Oakland (3), Oceana (2), Otsego (2), Ottawa (6), Saginaw (4), Sanilac (2), St. Clair (7), St. Joseph (3), Tuscola (2), Van Buren (3), Washtenaw (1), Wayne (10) and Wexford (4).

# The Adoption Stamp

By Jean Hoffman, Manager  
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A new stamp commemorates Americans' willingness and desire to participate in the joys of adoption.

U. S. Postmaster General William J. Henderson, Wendy's founder Dave Thomas and adoptive parent Rosie O'Donnell unveiled the first commemorative U.S. postage stamp celebrating adoption in Beverly Hills, Calif. last October. This commemorative stamp went on sale nationwide in May 2000.

"The adoption awareness stamp will serve as a simple 'thank you' to everyone involved in making homes for children and young adults who are less fortunate," said Henderson. "And it will help raise

awareness about how adoption can make a positive difference in the lives of so many."

The adoption stamp was designed to raise awareness and communicate the joys of adoption through the illustration by Greg Berger, who was adopted as a child. His intent was to convey a visual balance between reality and the possibilities of what might be, showing that childhood is a delicate and influential part of life.

His text, "Adopting a Child",



"Shaping a Life", "Building a Home" and "Creating a World" are accompanied by the bright colorful shapes and forms that create the image of happiness and hope.

The stamp not only serves as a tool for awareness but also a token of appreciation to everyone involved in the adoption process. Major events were sponsored in Michigan and around the nation to kick off issuance of the stamp and build awareness about children waiting for permanent homes and loving families.

An adoption stamp unveiling was held in Lansing May 23. To acquire the stamp or view it online go to: [www.stampsonline.com](http://www.stampsonline.com)

## Michigan Youth Leadership Forum held at MSU

### Forum helped high school students become tomorrow's leaders

EAST LANSING—Thirty Michigan high school students with disabilities participated in a unique leadership event on the MSU campus in July. The **Sondra Berlin Michigan Youth Leadership Forum** was



Lydia Graber

held July 16-20, bringing together selected students with disabilities who will enter their junior or senior years of high school this autumn. The program, coordinated by Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns (MCDC), was a career and leadership planning program. The students participated at no cost.

At a mentor luncheon July

20, MCDC chairperson Lydia Graber said the forum, which she first witnessed in California, was an exciting venue for young people and important for council members. "At first I wasn't impressed (in California), but when the kids got up and talked it changed my whole perspective," she said. "Our students will go back to their communities and be leaders. We need their energy and fresh ideas."

The four-day session introduced students to successful adults with disabilities and the political process, where they participated in a debate to introduce a new law through a mock legislative session.

Johnnie Tuitel, another MCDC commissioner, was the main speaker at the mentor luncheon, the final forum activity. Tuitel (pronounced title) is an author and owner of Alternatives in Motion, an enter-

prise that raises funds to give away wheelchairs.

"We just went over \$1 million in funds from donations," he said. "We are the only organization in the country that specifically does this. We've given away 150 chairs to people in 17 states."



Johnnie Tuitel

■ The MCDC provides information and technical assistance and advocates for services for Michigan citizens with disabilities. The governor appoints its 21 members and the commission is administered through the FIA.



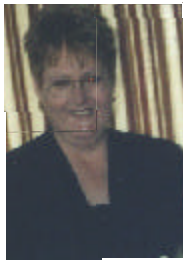
# Half-hundred Project Zero sites reach “zero”

Schoolcraft, St. Clair, Livingston and Delta run total to that turned the feat

When the Delta County Project Zero site attained its objective in June, a half-hundred Project Zero sites had reached their goal of “zero”.

The Delta County welfare reform program reached “zero” June 26, the 50<sup>th</sup> site to do so and fourth in the Upper Peninsula. It joined three other sites that hit zero the first time in June.

The St. Clair and Livingston county Project Zero programs reached zero June 15 and June 20, respectively, and Schoolcraft County reached zero June 7.



Robyn Loviska

“Project Zero continues as the most consistently remarkable project of its type in the nation,” said Gov. John Engler. “It proves you can achieve great things anywhere people in a community work together to meet common goals.”

Delta and St. Clair County joined Project Zero in 1998, Schoolcraft joined in 1999, and Livingston is the first of 19 counties joining the project in June 2000 to reach zero. The counties participate in a welfare reform initiative started in 1996 to encourage and support employment. Project Zero currently operates in 68 counties and 89 FIA offices. The goal is to reduce to zero the number of target FIP families without earned income. Target cases are expected to participate in Work First, find work and earn income.

## *Schoolcraft County*

Loviska said the county reached zero because of staff diligence,

cooperation between partner agencies and local business development. “Cooperation between the FIA, Work First and 4C (child care agency) was very impressive and a key factor,” said Loviska. “It helped us all stay focused on customer needs.”

Loviska said local business expansion created competition and resulted in higher wages for Project Zero customers. “A lot of our customers were helped by business expansion,” she said. “Hitting zero here was truly an example of community programs and businesses working together.”

Schoolcraft County Project Zero coordinator Sherry Salo said the county tried new things as a Project Zero site. “The FIA sponsored a job fair in the county that 400 people attended,” said Salo. “This was a first for our agency. Our Michigan Works Agency assisted businesses wanting to interview our customers.”

She said the Work First contractor, Schoolcraft County Economic Development Corporation, was an important partner with Community Coordinated Child Care (4C) of the Upper Peninsula. “The Work First case worker, Lisa Pokela, was critical to our customers’ success. Our 4C case worker, Sue Ellison, attended customer orientation sessions.”

“Project Zero in Schoolcraft County verified the same result as elsewhere: most people want to leave welfare, get jobs and support their families through work.”

## *St. Clair County*

“Project Zero was an office-wide initiative for us,” said St. Clair County FIA director James Nunnold.

“In March we began using ‘Z Teams’, a group of specialty workers that worked only with unemployed cases. Reaching zero is a credit to our staff and our partners.”

St. Clair County partners included the Macomb-St. Clair Workforce Development Board, the Michigan Works Agency (MWA); Ross Learning (the Work First

contractor); Michigan Rehabilitation Services; and Goodwill Industries, which operated a work program under contract to the MWA.



Jim Nunnold

Nunnold

said the St. Clair County effort benefited by having a representative of Community Coordinated Child Care (4C) onsite in the St. Clair FIA. 4C is a statewide organization that helps public assistance customers locate appropriate child care services.

“Our goal will be to repeat this each month, applying what we know,” said Nunnold. “The Z Team will continue to do orientation with new cases and any unemployed target case will be assigned to the Z Team after 60 days. It is an everyday workable philosophy.”

## *Livingston County*

“The key for us was establishing our Welfare to Work Committee, an official subcommittee of the Livingston County Workforce Development Council,” said Livingston County FIA director David Fitzgerald. “Community folks have been meeting for three years and made some real successes, especially in the

area of child care.”

Fitzgerald said the group reached an important consensus early in their deliberations. “We made a decision about our customers—that we would see them as our neighbors. When we asked ‘What does zero mean to us?’ we said it means zero tolerance—none of our neighbors will be left behind.”

Fitzgerald said the “community neighbor mindset” was carried over to the county’s FIA Board. “The board devotes the first hour of each monthly meeting to the Welfare-to-Work Committee, whose third anniversary will come in November.”

He said local partners in the Livingston County effort include: Livingston County Job Training Services, the MWA; a pair of contract agencies—Ross Learning and Work Skills of Brighton; Livingston County Community Coordinated Child Care; the Livingston Human Services Collaborative Body; and the Homeless Continuum of Care Committee, a group that looks out for the poorest people in one of Michigan’s wealthiest counties.

“We see hitting zero as a start of a continuing challenge to stay at zero,” Fitzgerald said. “We want all our residents to have solid employment roots whenever hard times return.”

#### *Delta County*

Steve Lieburn, director of Delta County FIA, said earlier



**Dave Fitzgerald**

successes in the partner county helped the Delta team reach its goal. “What we borrowed from our experience in Menominee County was a team approach,” he said. “We helped people with multiple barriers and, when we got near zero, we used a teamwork approach with our partners to help every last case go to work.”

Lieburn said partners in Delta County included: Escanaba-based Michigan Works Agency The Jobs Force; the Western Upper Peninsula Consortium, a Work First contractor to The Jobs Force that teams with the FIA to help get people into jobs; and the Upper Peninsula Child Care Coordinating Council, or 4C, whose representative worked with each public assistance family to coordinate child care services.

“People from those agencies worked together on every case,” said Lieburn. “Our FIA staff contributed greatly to removing barriers to work and our 4C representative, Sue Ellison, worked with every family.”

Delta County FIA Project Zero coordinator Mike Peach said two other partners helped qualifying FIA customers get jobs. “We have limited public transportation through the Delta Area Transit Authority (DATA),” he said. “Their buses ran Monday through Friday during normal business hours, but that did not accommodate the needs of all our customers.”

Through teamwork with Project Zero, Peach said DATA developed a “Ticket to Ride” that was good on all their bus circuits and could be used by two cab companies 24 hours a day seven days a week.

Delta County is the first Project

Zero program to implement Parenting Education Employment Readiness or PEER. This program serves single parents receiving public assistance who have children age 3 or younger. “It teaches them parenting skills and how to handle the pressure and everyday grind of a job simultaneously,” said Peach. The PEER program serves selected families in

Delta County and is being implemented in two other Project Zero sites.

“Delta County FIA director Steve Lieburn, his staff and community partners deserve



**Steve Lieburn**

our thanks,” said Family Independence Agency director Douglas E. Howard. “They’ve done a great job and met our goals.”

#### *State and local partnerships*

In Project Zero sites, barriers to employment for unemployed FIP customers are identified and services are developed to address those barriers. Local projects are constructed to meet the needs of local citizens. Services are provided locally by Project Zero partners and include family support, mentoring, employment support, transportation and child care.

Project partners at the state level include the FIA, Michigan Department of Career Development Work First and Michigan Works Agencies, Michigan departments of Transportation and Community Health and Michigan State Housing Development Authority.



# Residential Care Centers – The RCCs

## 12-bed facilities help transition to society for youth in justice system and FIA facilities

By Julie Jenkins, RCC Administrator  
FIA Office of Juvenile Justice, Novi  
Telephone (248) 442-6534

The RCCs are 12-bed, low security residential facilities operated by the Office of Juvenile Justice. These centers provide transition, reintegration and aftercare services for youth exiting larger juvenile justice institutions such as Maxey Training School in Whitmore Lake, Adrian Training School and Starr Commonwealth. The centers are:

- Academy Hall in Kalamazoo, directed by Dean Miedema and managed by JoAnn Harris.
- Park Place (the only one for females) in Kalamazoo directed by Sid Weaver and managed by Belinda Carter.
- Flint House in Flint is directed by John Litwin and managed by Ken Marks.
- Pine Lodge in Lansing is directed by Mike Opsommer and managed by Ron Drinkard.
- Parmenter House in Bay City is directed by Frank Hoese and managed by Tom Lock.

RCCs have long waiting lists for their limited available bed space. Because of this, and because of identified needs for additional reintegration services for youth exiting public institutions, RCC directors and staff started a planning process to expand services to include youth who may be living in their own homes, foster care or independent living. Programming will reflect the “balanced and restorative justice” philosophy focused on repairing harm to victims and communities caused by crime, developing competencies in youthful residents, and protecting the public safety.

The 25-bed coed Arbor Heights Center in Ann Arbor, a

residential FIA facility that is well known for its excellence in working with families of juvenile justice youth, is being included in this new reintegration model. RCCs will be called “community justice centers” to reflect this expanded focus.

RCCs are frequently the gateways to independence for youth that learn social and independent

humanity projects and building bridges. Other projects include beautifying parks through participation with the DNR, assisting with food banks, church organizations, helping physically challenged youth learn to ride horses, wrapping gifts for children at Christmas. Each helps to make the youth feel valued and valuable – an important part of their



living skills. In the RCCs they gain real life experiences and grow mentally, emotionally and spiritually. They begin or complete educational endeavors ranging from GED acquisition to community college or university admission and enrollment. Young residents also enter the world of work and gain experience in a variety of occupations. RCC staff members spend more time these days helping youth hunt for apartments, buy furniture, and set up housekeeping. Staff are also there to support them when the going gets tough.

Another significant component to these programs is community service, framed through the lens of balanced and restorative justice. In this, youth are taught the benefits of giving back to the community and to their victims. Projects include service in nursing homes, senior centers, building ramps for physically challenged senior citizens, Habitat for

rehabilitation.

RCC managers and staff persons perform difficult work and assist the youth in making significant gains, for which they deserve our congratulations. This year, eight youth graduated from community high schools, several of them went to their senior prom, and the staff had graduation parties with family and friends for them. The staff helped them celebrate their noteworthy accomplishments by giving them graduation parties with family and friends. All youth were employed and/or attended school, and several youth have returned to the training schools and detention centers to share their community experiences in an effort to support and teach their former peers. This is good news that will get better.





# “Woman’s build” connects girls to the community

Three residents from Nokomis Challenge Center contribute to Habitat for Humanity home

By Kate Hanley, Director  
Nokomis Challenge Center  
Telephone (517) 366-5368

PRUDENVILLE— This spring, Habitat for Humanity in Roscommon County sponsored an “all-woman’s build” to construct a 1,100 square foot home for a single mother and her three children. Three young women from the Nokomis Challenge Center volunteered to be involved in this community project.

Nokomis Challenge Center is a medium secure juvenile justice facility located in Prudenville. The center, which is administered by the FIA Office of Juvenile Justice, serves 20 males and 20 females age 14-19 from all areas of the state who are court-ordered into placement at the facility.

Resident participation in community service projects such as Habitat for Humanity is part of the restorative justice model in which FIA institutions participate. In part, restorative justice is about making amends for wrongdoing and giving something back to the community.

“FIA is committed in assisting youth to develop a sense of ownership for their actions in the community,” said James E. Beougher, director of the FIA Child and Family Services Administration. “The ability of these young women to successfully complete such a worthwhile community project is encouraging.”

The woman’s build project required those young women to participate in nine training sessions on the basic skills of home building including roofing, siding, drywall and

the use of power tools. The girls attended and eagerly participated in these skill-building sessions.

The building project began May 8 after a day of construction site set up. The three young women were main participants during the setup phase, lending muscle and sweat to help make sure things were ready for

with the number of volunteers dwindling. The girls from Nokomis persevered and continued to put in many hours every day, rain or shine, to complete the project in which they had already invested so much.

Community businesses contributed funds and food for the project and several men even dressed up as females to cook lunch the first day. A basketball game fundraising event was held simultaneously, pitting two local TV stations against each other with the male cheerleaders sporting a little more hair than usual.

By the day of dedication on Mother’s Day, May 14, the house was roofed and the siding was up. The interior walls were roughed in and much of the prep work for electrical was done.

The Nokomis girls who gave of themselves have much to be proud of for their efforts. They learned some very useful

the build day. More than 100 women ranging in age from 14 to 74 volunteered as part of this Habitat for Humanity project.

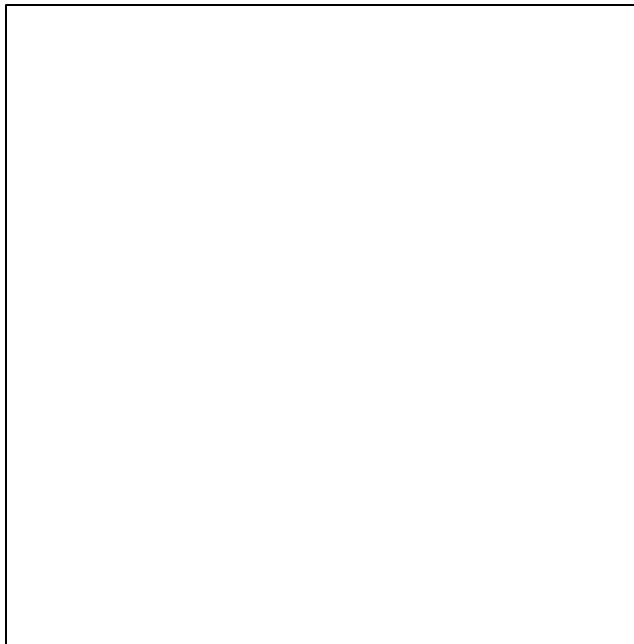
The exterior walls for the home were constructed by a crew at a women’s prison and were delivered to the site. This unusual all-woman project resulted in a great deal of publicity and public interest to the wonderful work done by Habitat for Humanity.

The weather cooperated for the first few days. However, by the end of the week it was cold and rainy

information on home maintenance and building and acquired skills that will serve them well in the future.

One message from the event was that women can do anything they put their minds to when they work together and support one another. This and giving something back to the community in a meaningful way are important messages for the participating Nokomis Center girls.

In restorative justice, the girls hear this every day at Nokomis Challenge Center. It was gratifying to have an opportunity to see it in action.



# Working safely in communities continued from page 3

The FIA offered alternative language for Lisa's law. Opponents to the alternative argued that it would have done nothing more than lock in current worker safety practice. That is essentially true but not inconsequential. Governor Engler has been extremely supportive of our worker safety initiatives, and I have tried to continue and expand on our own agency's internal support. I believe the alternative language would have helped ensure protections for staff today and in the future by locking in minimum expectations and standards.

Based on requests from FIA field staff, our agency has worked with members of the Michigan Senate to expand worker safety legislation. When the Legislature returns, we will move forward with a package that will make it a crime to threaten a state employee and make it a crime to impersonate a CPS worker. In the meantime, our agency is working in other areas. In May of this year, a group of local office managers and FIA Central Office staff met to develop recommendations for personal safety. Some of the recommendations they made that I am interested in include:

- A "safety summit" that would periodically meet to review worker safety issues.
- Designation of certain weeks as safety awareness weeks.
- Mandatory "Defusing Threatening Behavior" training on a regular basis.

Based on conversations I have had, I believe our staff appreciates changes and improvements that our agency has made. We are continuing our commitment—this year our budget includes \$4 million to support our worker safety initiatives, from technology to training. Some of you want us to take another look at the existing training as to quality and content; we will do that, because I want meaningful training. I believe some of you want me to go further; I will in some areas, but not all areas. My commitments are to continue a focus on worker safety, maintain or improve the quality of worker safety training, continue to support the technologies in place for workers, and continue to explore potential legislative actions that advance the worker safety agenda. I will continue to personally ask from time to time what we can do to strengthen state and local agency partnerships to enhance safety. I intend to keep in touch with the different opinions on what we are doing and what we can do. Thank you for everything you do.

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